



EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION FOR
THE EDUCATION OF ADULTS

For Information

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EAEA Statement on the European Pillar of Social Rights - Call for evidence

EAEA's Statement - October 2025

EAEA participated in the **Commission's call for evidence on the European Pillar of Social Rights**, inviting the Commission to continue its holistic approach to education and skills. EAEA calls for stronger dialogues with the civil society organisations, learning providers, and learners in the implementation and monitoring of the EPSR, at all levels, to drive systemic and inclusive educational change.

Key Recommendations

- **Embed the EPSR within a lifelong learning framework** - this means linking skills, education, training, and social rights policies to ensure coherent and flexible learning pathways for all citizens at all ages.
- **Strengthen coordination across EU institutions and Commission's Directorate-General** - the development of frameworks should be aligned and interconnected to avoid policy fragmentation and make the best use of resources.
- **Invest sustainably in adult learning and education** - governments should establish well-structured lifelong learning and upskilling strategies that bring long-term social and economic returns.
- **Prioritise inclusion and learner-centered approaches** - EU efforts and funding should focus more on disadvantaged and vulnerable groups, and equal valuing of formal, non-formal, and informal learning.



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EAEA welcomes the continued commitment of the European Commission to the European Pillar. It has become even more important over the last few years.

The focus on competitiveness will only be possible if, at the same time, there is a commitment to social rights. EAEA also believes that the different principles need to be seen **holistically**, i.e. interlinked and benefitting all citizens of Europe. There are a number of initiatives where the overlaps seem obvious and should be taken into consideration when planning further actions. The fight to reduce poverty and social exclusion, for example, goes hand in hand with better access to learning opportunities, outreach and low-threshold learning opportunities.

So far, the benchmark set for the participation of adults in learning is unfortunately lagging behind. Especially when it comes to adult learning and education, the necessary infrastructures and funding often lack of clear ownership from the departments of the Commission. An explanation could be that, in many cases, **the investment in learning brings returns in the long-term.** Governments might then shy away from more systemic changes, failing to see how the establishment of well-structured lifelong learning and upskilling strategies would be essential for the positive development of people, communities, economies and Europe. Due to subsidiarity and fragmentation, the first principle of the Pillar is hampered by many obstacles.

"Formal learning plays a limited and declining role in the training of adults, but non-formal learning is widespread. Across the OECD, only 8% of adults participate in formal education, while 37% participate in non-formal learning."

OECD - Trends in Adult Learning 2023

The European Pillar needs to be closely linked with all initiatives and policies in the skills, education, training and lifelong learning area. Different entities share responsibilities in this matter, which is why increased coordination and better cooperation is crucial. In the last years, strategies concerning skills, such as competence frameworks (e.g. DigiComp, GreenComp) have been developed by different Directorate-Generals. A close link between these needs to be established. **Coordination is of utmost importance, in order to avoid (further) fragmentation and to make the most of available resources.** The Sustainable Development Goals should be taken into consideration in the development of policies as well.

In order to embrace a true holistic approach, it is fundamental to put the EPSR and the Union of Skills into the same framework of lifelong learning.

This will put the appropriate emphasis on flexible learning pathways, in a more learner-centered approach. It would also link different areas that need to be tackled from different sides but at the same time and with an eye to finding solutions that are interlinked.

Lifelong (and lifewide) learning naturally opens and combines learning for life and learning for work, learning for citizenship and democracy as well as learning key competences. The societal changes of the last few years make it abundantly clear that adults need to work in higher-skilled areas and upskill, but also to understand and cope with challenges to free speech, democratic deficits and the manipulations of social media. Lifelong Learning also ensures that older people (and other people not active in the labour market) are not left behind. Tools such as **Individual Learning Accounts** and **microcredentials** are highly important initiatives but those not directly concerned by them should have the opportunity to continue learning.

It is essential that the Pillar has a positive impact on the **disadvantaged and vulnerable people**. This requires a stronger attention on **outreach, recognition and validation** of prior learning as well as support within people's lives and contexts, i.e. a learner-centered approach that enables people to access services and ultimately have better lives. In this framework, adult learning must contain vocational and general adult education and learning and see it as equal to other sectors of learning, such as **formal, non-formal and informal learning**.

EAEA agrees that EU funding should continue to be used for the further development of the Pillar, and especially support the further development of learning across Europe and drive systemic changes to improve basic and life/work skills learning.

In order to implement the Pillar, and especially in the areas where it has not been as successful as benchmarked, a variety of stakeholders need to be involved. This concerns for example the social partners, but especially civil society - including providers of learning opportunities as well as learners themselves.



This needs to happen at different levels starting from the European level to the national and regional ones. **Europe needs a realistic vision on how to create resilient and successful learning and education systems and the tools to implement them.** The only possible way to reach this goal is through cooperation between different sectors and across different institutions, bringing all concerned and necessary stakeholders together.

The European Pillar can and should be the driver behind it.

About us

The European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA) is the voice of non-formal adult education in Europe. EAEA is a European NGO with 120 member organisations in 44 countries and represents more than 60 million learners Europe-wide.



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